

A RING IN THE CASE

By FRANK HARRIS

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Meager as was Jenny's salary, one half of it had paid for the tiny room on Mrs. Cady's third floor and furnished Jenny's inadequate supply of food and clothing, and the other half until the last two months had gone regularly to her mother on the little unproductive Rhode Island farm.

But these last two months had made a new division in the stipend. Now it was in three parts, and the third went to the fourth floor of Mrs. Cady's apartment house to a room even more tiny and bare than her own. She had heard a low moaning one day, apparently from the room above, and had gone up and tapped anxiously on the door. Several minutes had passed before she heard a feeble step across the floor, and then the door had opened, and she had



"ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?" SHE DEMANDED.

looked into the sweetest, most refined old face she had ever seen, but, oh, so wan and patient and hopeless.

No, nothing was wanted, the old woman said. She had only lost control of herself for a moment; that was all. And she smiled with pitiful cheerfulness as she closed the door.

But Jenny had seen enough. That face and one brief glimpse into the room beyond sent her hurrying downstairs after her own bowl of soup and bit of bread and butter. And in spite of the old woman's protests and entreaties she had literally forced her to eat, laughing, but unyielding and firm. And with the first spoonful of soup there had come a light into the woman's eyes which made Jenny turn abruptly and walk to the one small window, choking back something in her throat. It was as she had suspected, only worse. The old woman had been literally starving.

Since then they had been good friends, Jenny, tender and imperious, bringing her own oil stove and provisions to the fourth floor room, so that there should be no more question of hunger, and the old woman deprecating, but yielding. It meant less for the hardworking mother on the farm and less for herself, but Jenny scarcely thought of these things. Her mother would have it so, she knew. The old woman was in greater need than they and should be looked after first.

And now had come a promotion, and with it she would have to leave the apartment house and board in the family of her employer. But the old woman should have the oil stove and the small supply of provisions on hand, and—yes, she should have the bit of carpet she had bought. It would be warm for the poor old feet.

So when she went up to the fourth floor to say goodby she carried the bit of carpet and a teapot and some books she thought the old woman might like to read. An hour was spent in talking and planning, and then she turned to leave, the old woman following her to the door.

"I will not try to thank you, dear," she said softly. "Words are so inadequate. But you know"—she removed a quaintly wrought circlet of gold from her finger and slipped it on one of Jenny's—"I want you to wear this to remember me by. It is not valuable except for association and tradition. My father brought it from India and gave it to me long, long ago, when I was a little girl. He said the tiny setting was a luck stone and that the ring would be a talisman to good fortune." She smiled wistfully and added, "I hope the fortune will be better for you than it has been for me, dear."

An hour later Jenny was in a street car on the way to the new boarding place. Opposite her sat a man who seemed to be looking through the window at her back, but from time to time, when her gaze rose suddenly, she found him looking straight at her. He had been on the sidewalk when she left the apartment house and had boarded the same car and changed at the same transfer, but of that she would not

have thought, for such coincidences could easily happen in a city. Only when she again alighted and the man stepped beside her to the sidewalk she suddenly turned to him, her eyes flashing.

"Are you following me?" she demanded.

The man smiled assentingly.

"Why, yes; I may as well acknowledge I have been," he replied. "I wanted to be perfectly sure first, but it's all right. You must come along with me—to the police station, you know." At the incredulity and horror in her face. "I am a detective."

"But what for?" indignantly. "Oh, just for the ring on your finger," easily, "though of course you know. It's been in the papers the last ten days—only ring like it in the country, big reward and all that. What puzzles me, though, is you being so simple as to put it on openly. We were given a hint by your landlady this morning that a ring something like the one advertised was in her house, but from what she said we had an idea it was worn by an old woman. I've been on the watch several hours. Now come along. If you don't make a fuss we can walk quietly and nobody will notice."

Jenny's head was in a whirl. The ring was evidently stolen, but she did not for a moment think of the old woman as a thief, and yet she claimed to have owned the ring since she was a young girl.

"There's some mistake," she faltered. "Of course there is," cheerfully, "and it's too bad to put you to so much inconvenience. But you'll have to go and explain to the judge and to the owner of the ring, who will be telephoned for. You can do that easily enough." And the officer grinned sarcastically.

When the owner came he proved to be a young man, the sight of whom brought a quick flush to Jenny's face. He was the son of the man for whom she worked.

"What! You?" he exclaimed, then to the officer: "You have made a mistake. This young lady—"

"Goods found on her," interrupted the officer laconically. "Look at her finger."

"I don't care," he vehemently. "She isn't the one." He glanced at the circlet on Jenny's finger, and an odd look came to his face as he added, "Besides, the ring isn't in the least like mine—not in the least."

"Exactly like your description," dryly, "and I believe your advertisement added that the name 'Eloise Nevins' was inside. Suppose we look and see."

"No, no," hastily. "It isn't worth while. The ring is entirely different."

But Jenny was slipping the ring from her finger hurriedly.

"It is 'Eloise,' not 'Eloise,' inside," she cried.

"What?" The young man took the ring and examined it eagerly, incredulously.

"It must be Aunt Eloise's," he said at last in an awed voice. "Grandfather gave a ring to each of his daughters, but Aunt Eloise's was lost or supposed to be when her vessel went down in mid-ocean twenty years ago."

"Your Aunt Eloise is alive in an east side apartment house," exclaimed Jenny, "or at least I saw the name 'Eloise Nevins' in some books, and their owner gave me this ring."

"Case dismissed," said the judge briskly. "Officer, bring up the next."

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